U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Plain Writing Act Compliance Report
July 2013

I.   Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing:

a.   Bonnie Miranda, Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Office of the Executive Secretariat

b.   Gemma Button, Deputy Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Office of the Executive Secretariat

c.   Liz Tate, Chief, Executive Correspondence, National Cemetery Administration

d.   Katrice Pasteur, Director, Office of Executive Correspondence, Veterans Health Administration

e.   Names of Plain Language coordinators within the agency.

The Department has Plain Language Coordinators from its staff offices that serve on the Department's Plain Language Working Group and promote plain language within their offices. The representatives are from the following offices:

- Office of Acquisition, Construction, and Logistics.
- Office of Management
- Office of Information and Technology
- Office of Policy and Planning
- Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
- Office of General Counsel
- Office of Survivors' Assistance
- Center for Minority Veterans
- Center for Women Veterans

II.   Explain what specific types of agency communications have you released by making them available in a format that is consistent with the Plain Writing guidelines.

Type of communications of document or posting. List how this is made available to the public	Who is the intended user and approximate number of potential users	What has changed by using Plain Writing
Brochures, forms, notices, meeting notices/notes, Web pages, and general correspondence.	Members of Congress, Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations, State and local officials, Veterans, and the general public.	Most documents are now written in the active voice.

III. Inform agency staff of Plain Writing Act's requirements:

a. Information on the Act is posted on the Department's external Web site.

b. Posters, signs, etc. Distribution was made to the Department's correspondence offices in early July 2013.

c. On June 25, 2013, an internal memorandum from the Interim Chief of Staff was sent to VA leadership providing information on the Act and endorsing plain language training developed by VA's Learning University.

d. The Act's requirements were briefed to leadership during VA's Executive Leadership Board and Senior Leadership Group meetings during the month of July 2013.

IV. Training

a. Agency training provided:

Type of Training	Number of employees trained	Date
In house from the VA Learning University (combo of online and live)	TBD	May 23 – September 2013
PLAIN provided training – live	None	
Webinars	n/a	

V. Ongoing compliance/ sustaining change

a. VA has plans to develop a national system for testing multi-use documents (those sent to hundreds or thousands of people) for plain language compliance. Once staff is trained, the staff will be responsible for testing. Developing a national system should assist us in identifying the various clearance processes used within each office and how they ensure the use of plain language and plain writing in all their communications.

b. VA's Plain Language Working Group, consisting of representatives from the VA Administrations and Staff offices, will meet quarterly to provide recommendations for implementing the Act, and disseminate information throughout the Agency.

c. VA's Regulation Rewrite Project was initiated in 2002 to rewrite regulations concerning VA's compensation and pension benefits programs. VA is currently in the final phase publishing its new regulations, first as notices or proposed rulemaking, then as one final rule which will be the new Part 5 of title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

d. VA will make plain language Department policy. VA's plain language working group will initiate this tasking in October 2013.

VI. Agency's plain writing website

a. Website address: http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp

b. Contact us page: http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp, VAPlainLanguage@va.gov

c. Link from VA's home page: http://www.va.gov/

d. Links to Compliance reports – 2013 report is pending

e. Links to OMB and PLAIN are found at http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp

VII. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Writing Communications

VA currently uses two types of document testing:

1. Cued protocol testing for letters and simpler documents to ensure the reader understands what VA intended to say.
2. Usability testing for complicated formats such as forms, brochures and informational packets. This technique ensures that the reader can easily find the information needed and can supply us with the information we need.

Past testing caused us to completely redesign documents, as well as change wording. In some cases it taught us what Veterans expect in a letter that we had not included. Adding that information saves Veterans time because it lessens their need to call VA's toll-free number with questions, and makes VA more efficient by allowing employees to focus on processing claims and providing other services. In addition, VA received very positive feedback from our clients because they felt that they were part of the process. VA is about to launch a much larger scale testing protocol that will eventually reach across the country, allowing offices and hospitals anywhere to test with their particular group or clients.

Example of successful testing:

The Insurance Beneficiary Financial Counseling Brochure was the recipient of the *ClearMark Award* in the Government Category for Best Rewritten Document. According to judges' comments, the primary reason for recognition was the extensive protocol used and VA's usability testing. The document went from 58 pages to 8.   As a result, the number of users increased.

VA continues to monitor feedback provide through VA's Plain Language Web site and will take measures to improve our communication with the public.